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Address to the Senate on February 10, 1922

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U.S. President, 1917-1921 (1922)

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ADDRESS ⁷⁶⁵
OF THE ³³³
PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES

IN LAYING BEFORE THE SENATE A
GROUP OF TREATIES NEGOTIATED
BY THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE
ON LIMITATION OF ARMAMENT

Washington
February 10, 1922



WASHINGTON
1922



JUN 3 1922

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO THE SENATE.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE SENATE:

I have come to make report to you of the conclusions of what has been termed the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament, and to lay before you the series of treaties which the United States and the other powers participating in the conference have negotiated and signed, and have announced to the world. Apart from the very great satisfaction in reporting to the Senate, it is a privilege as well as a duty to ask that advice and consent which the Constitution requires to make these covenants effective.

Accompanying the treaties I bring to you the complete minutes of both plenary sessions and committee meetings, and a copy of the official report made to me by the American Delegation to the conference. Both the complete minutes and the official report of the American Delegation are new accompaniments to the Executive report of a treaty or treaties, but they are fitting testimonials to that open and simpler diplomacy for which the world has asked, and the practice of which contributed largely to the success of the conference so recently adjourned. I trust they will facilitate that ample and helpful understanding which is desirable in the Senate, and reflect that understanding which was the keynote of the conference itself.

The whole transaction is quite out of the ordinary. I am not thinking of the achievement, which I hope the Senate will come to appraise highly as I do, and as the world seems to do. I am not thinking of the commendable processes by which agreements were wrought, though this was a conference wholly of free nations, exercising every national right and authority, in which every agreement was stamped with unanimity. Indeed, it was a conference of friends, proceeding in deliberation and sympathy, appraising their friendly and peaceful relations and resolved to maintain them, and give to the world new assurances of peace and actual relief from the burdens of excessive and competitive armament. But the out-of-the-ordinary phases which I have in mind are that the Senate—indeed, the Congress—has already advised in favor of one—and inferentially of two—of the treaties laid before you to-day, and the naval pact negotiated and signed is in accordance with your expressed wish. It calls a halt in the competitive construction of capital ships in the

great navies of the world, and affords the first actual relief from naval burdens which peoples have been able to acclaim since steam and steel combined to add to naval strength in warfare.

But, though the treaty recommended by the Congress marks the beginning of a naval holiday and that limitation of naval armament which accords with a world aspiration, the particular justification of this progressive and highly gratifying step was the settlement of the international problems of the Pacific, attended by new understandings in place of menacing disagreements, and established sureties instead of uncertainties which easily might lead to conflict. Much as it was desirable to lift the burdens of naval armament and strike at the menace of competitive construction and consequent expenditure, the Executive branch of the Government, which must be watchful for the Nation's safety, was unwilling to covenant a reduction of armament until there could be plighted new guaranties of peace, until there could be removed the probable menaces of conflict. Therefore all the treaties submitted for your approval have such important relationship, one to another, that, though not interdependent, they are the covenants of harmony, of assurance, of conviction, of conscience, and of unanimity. These we have believed to be essential to perfect the fulfillment which the Congress has in mind.

As a simple matter of fact, all of the agreements, except those dealing directly with the limitation of armament, take the place of various multi-power treaties, arrangements or understandings, formal or informal, expressed or implied, relating to matters in the Pacific Ocean, in which all the powers signatory were essentially, if not equally, concerned. The new agreements serve to put an end to contradictions, to remove ambiguities, and establish clear understandings.

No matter what mental reservations may have existed, or what doubts may have prevailed, because here was an experiment new in many phases, all of the powers came to the conference knowing it was to deal with very practical situations affecting their international relations. There was mutual interest, quite apart from the greater achievement for world peace, and a way to common understanding was found to be practical and speedily arranged. If it has developed a new-world school of diplomacy, let it be so called. It revealed the ends aimed at in the very beginning, and pointed the way to their attainment. The powers in conference took the world of the Pacific as they found it in fact. They dealt with actualities by voluntary and unanimous agreement, and have added to mankind's assurances and hopefully advanced international peace.

It is worth while saying that the powers in this conference sought no concert to dispossess any power of its rights or property. All the signatories have given up certain rights which they had, as their

contribution to concord and peace, but at no sacrifice of national pride, with no regret or resentment to later flame in conflict. Some relinquished certain rights or prerogatives which they had asserted, notably in the settlement of the Shantung controversy, dealt with in a covenant quite apart from the group herewith submitted. But every concession was a willing one, without pressure or constraint. The conference record is quite unparalleled, not alone because there was the maximum of good feeling and neighborliness throughout the session, but common rejoicing in the results; and the separations in departure were marked by genuine cordiality, good will, and new hopes.

It is not necessary to remind you that the conference work was not directed against any power or group of powers. There were no punishments to inflict, no rewards to bestow. Mutual consideration, and the common welfare, and the desire for world peace impelled. The conclusions reached and the covenants written neither require nor contemplate compulsive measures against any power in the world, signatory or non-signatory. The offerings are free will; the conscience is that of world-opinion; the observance is a matter of national honor.

These treaties leave no power despoiled. The delegates of every power participating adjourned with every right and every authority with which they came, except that which was willingly and gladly given up to further the common welfare. I can assure you the nine powers have been brought more closely together, they are stauncher neighbors and friends, they have clearer and better estimates of one another, they have seen suspicion challenged and selfishness made to retreat, they have keener and more sympathetic understandings, and they are more strongly willed for right and justice in international relations than ever before. I believe, with all my heart, the powers in conference have combined to make the world safer and better and more hopeful place in which to live.

It was a helpful thing to have the conference reveal how common our human aspirations are and how easy it is, when the task is properly approached, to reconcile our national aspirations. There are mutual and essential interests affecting the welfare and peace of all nations, and they can not be promoted by force. They can be revealed and magnified in that understanding which, it is now proven, the conference of peace promotes, and the same understanding makes compulsion and despoilment hateful in the eyes of mankind.

The treaties submitted, seven in number, are—

The covenant of limitation to naval armament between our republic, the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan.

The treaty between the same powers in relation to the use of submarines and noxious gases in warfare.

The treaty between the United States, the British Empire, France, and Japan relating to their insular possessions and their insular dominions in the Pacific.

A declaration accompanying the four-power treaty reserving American rights in mandated territory.

An agreement supplementary to the four-power treaty defining the application of the term "insular possession and insular dominions" as relating to Japan.

A treaty between the nine powers in the conference relating to principles and policies to be followed in matters concerning China.

A treaty between the nine powers relating to Chinese customs tariff.

I invite your prompt approval of all of them. It is quite impossible to readjust our naval program until the naval treaty has your sanction, even though you urged its negotiation. It is not possible to make the readjustment in full confidence, until the whole program has commended itself to your approval.

I am not unmindful, nor was the conference, of the sentiment in this Chamber against Old World entanglements. Those who made the treaties have left no doubt about their true import. Every expression in the conference has emphasized the purpose to be served and the obligations assumed. Therefore, I can bring you every assurance that nothing in any of these treaties commits the United States, or any other power, to any kind of an alliance, entanglement, or involvement. It does not require us or any power to surrender a worthwhile tradition. It has been said, if this be true, these are mere meaningless treaties, and therefore valueless. Let us accept no such doctrine of despair as that. If nations may not establish by mutual understanding the rules and principles which are to govern their relationship; if a sovereign and solemn plight of faith by leading nations of the earth is valueless; if nations may not trust one another, then, indeed, there is little on which to hang our faith in advancing civilization or the furtherance of peace. Either we must live and aspire and achieve under a free and common understanding among peoples, with mutual trust, respect, and forbearance, and exercising full sovereignty, or else brutal, armed force will dominate, and the sorrows and burdens of war in this decade will be turned to the chaos and hopelessness of the next. We can no more do without international negotiations and agreements in these modern days than we could maintain orderly neighborliness at home without the prescribed rules of conduct which are more the guaranties of freedom than the restraint thereof.

The world has been hungering for a better relationship for centuries since it has attained its larger consciousness. The conception of the League of Nations was a response to a manifest world hunger.

Whatever its fate, whether it achieves the great things hoped for, or comes to supersedure, or to failure, the American unwillingness to be a part of it has been expressed. That unwillingness has been kept in mind, and the treaties submitted to-day have no semblance or relationship save as the wish to promote peace has been the common inspiration.

The four-power treaty contains no war commitment. It covenants the respect of each nation's rights in relation to its insular possessions. In case of controversy between the covenanting powers it is agreed to confer and seek adjustment, and if said rights are threatened by the aggressive action of any outside power, these friendly powers, respecting one another, are to communicate, perhaps confer, in order to understand what action may be taken, jointly or separately, to meet a menacing situation. There is no commitment to armed force, no alliance, no written or moral obligation to join in defence, no expressed or implied commitment to arrive at any agreement except in accordance with our constitutional methods. It is easy to believe, however, that such a conference of the four powers is a moral warning that an aggressive nation, giving affront to the four great powers ready to focus world opinion on a given controversy, would be embarking on a hazardous enterprise.

Frankly, Senators, if nations may not safely agree to respect each other's rights, and may not agree to confer if one to the compact threatens trespass, or may not agree to advise if one party to the pact is threatened by an outside power, then all concerted efforts to tranquilize the world and stabilize peace must be flung to the winds. Either these treaties must have your cordial sanction, or every proclaimed desire to promote peace and prevent war becomes a hollow mockery.

We have seen the eyes of the world turned to the Pacific. With Europe prostrate and penitent, none feared the likelihood of early conflict there. But the Pacific had its menaces, and they deeply concerned us. Our territorial interests are larger there. Its waters are not strange seas to us, its farther shores not unknown to our citizens. Our earlier triumphs of commerce were there. We began treaty relationships with China full eighty years ago, in the youthful vigor of our republic, and the sailings of our clipper ships were the romance of our merchant marine, when it successfully challenged the competition of the world. Seventy years ago Commodore Perry revealed Japan to commerce, and there followed that surpassing development of the island empire, with whom our unbroken peace found a most gratifying reflex in the conference just closed.

A century ago we began planting the seeds of American friendship in Hawaii, and seventy years ago Webster told the Senate that the United States could "never consent to see these islands taken pos-

session of by either of the great commercial powers of Europe." Whether it was destiny, or the development of propinquity, or the influence of our colonists, or faith in our institutions, Hawaii came under the flag in 1898, and rejoices to-day as a part of our Republic.

The lure of the waters, or the march of empire, or the call of commerce or inscrutable destiny led us on, and we went to the South Seas and planted the flag in Samoa. Out of the war with Spain came our sponsorship in the Philippines, and the possession of Guam; and so we are deeply concerned in the mid-Pacific, the South Seas, and the very center of the Far East. We crave peace there as we do on the continent, and we should be remiss in performing a national duty if we did not covenant the relations which tend to guarantee it. For more than a half century we have had a part in influencing the affairs of the Pacific, and our present proposed commitments are not materially different in character, nor materially greater in extent, though fraught with vastly less danger, than our undertakings in the past.

We have convinced the on-looking and interested powers that we covet the possessions of no other power in the Far East, and we know for ourselves that we crave no further or greater governmental or territorial responsibilities there. Contemplating what is admittedly ours, and mindful of a long-time and reciprocal friendship with China, we do wish the opportunity to continue the development of our trade peacefully, and on equality with other nations, to strengthen our ties of friendship, and to make sure the righteous and just relationships of peace.

Holding the possessions we do, entertaining these views, and confessing these ambitions, why should we not make reciprocal engagements to respect the territory of others and contract their respect of ours, and thus quiet apprehension and put an end to suspicion?

There has been concern. There has been apprehension of territorial greed, a most fruitful cause of war. The conference has dissipated both, and your ratification of the covenants made will stabilize a peace for the breaking of which there is not a shadow of reason or real excuse. We shall not have less than before. No one of us shall have less than before. There is no narrowed liberty, no hampered independence, no shattered sovereignty, no added obligation. We will have new assurances, new freedom from anxiety, and new manifestations of the sincerity of our own intentions; a new demonstration of that honesty which proclaims a righteous and powerful republic.

I am ready to assume the sincerity and the dependability of the assurances of our neighbors of the Old World that they will respect our rights, just as I know we mean to respect theirs. I believe there

is an inviolable national honor, and I bring to you this particular covenant in the confident belief that it is the outstanding compact of peace for the Pacific, which will justify the limitation of armament and prove a new guarantee to peace and liberty, and maintained sovereignty and free institutions.

No allusion has been made to the treaty restraining and limiting the use of the submarine, and the prohibition of noxious gases in warfare. Since we are asking the world's adherence, it is easily assumed that none in America will hold aloof.

Nor need I dwell on the nine-power treaty relating to principles and policies to be followed in the relationship of the signatory powers to China. Our traditional friendship for the ancient empire, our continued friendship for the new republic, our commitment of more than twenty years to the open door, and our avowed concern for Chinese integrity and unimpaired sovereignty, make it easy to assume that the Senate will promptly and unanimously assent. China's own satisfaction in the restorations covenanted here has been officially expressed, quite apart from the testifying signatures.

Perhaps I may fittingly add a word which is suggested by my relationship as a former member of the Senate. I had occasion to learn of your very proper jealousy of the Senate's part in contracting foreign relationships. Frankly, it was in my mind when I asked representatives of both the majority and minority to serve on the American Delegation. It was designed to have you participate. And you were ably represented.

The Senate's concern for freedom from entanglements, for preserved traditions, for maintained independence, was never once forgotten by the American Delegates. If I did not believe these treaties brought us not only new guaranties of peace but greater assurances of freedom from conflict, I would not submit them to your consideration.

Much depends on your decision. We have joined in giving to the world the spectacle of nations gathering about the conference table, amid the convictions of peace, free from all passion, to face each other in the contacts of reason, to solve menacing problems, and end disputes, and clear up misunderstandings. They have agreed to confer again when desirable, and turn the revealing light of world opinion on any menace to peace among them. Your Government encouraged, and has signed the compacts which it had much to do in fashioning. If to these understandings for peace, if to these advanced expressions of the conscience of leading powers, if to these concords to guard against conflict and lift the burdens of armament, if to all of these the Senate will not advise and consent, then it will be futile to try again. Here has been exercised every caution consistent with accomplishment. Here was a beginning on your advice, no

matter when conceived, and the program was enlarged, only because assurances of tranquillity were deemed the appropriate concomitants of the great experiment in arms limitation.

I alluded a moment ago to my knowledge of the viewpoint of the Senate, from personal experience. Since that experience I have come to know the viewpoint and inescapable responsibility of the Executive. To the Executive comes the closer view of world relationship and a more impressive realization of the menaces, the anxieties, and the apprehensions to be met.

We have no rivalries in our devotion to the things we call American, because that is a common consecration. None of us means to endanger, none of us would sacrifice a cherished national inheritance. In mindfulness of this mutuality of interest, common devotion, and shared authority, I submit to the Senate that if we can not join in making effective these covenants for peace, and stamp this conference with America's approval, we shall discredit the influence of the Republic, render future efforts futile or unlikely, and write discouragement where to-day the world is ready to acclaim new hope. Because of this feeling, because I believe in the merits of these engagements, I submit them to the Senate with every confidence that you will approve.

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